

IPSWICH BIRD NOTES.<sup>1</sup>

BY CHARLES W. TOWNSEND, M. D.

SINCE my 'Birds of Essex County' was published in 1905 as a Memoir of the Nuttall Ornithological Club I have collected a large number of bird notes from that county which I expect in due time will be published as a supplement. The following notes are of especial interest and are recorded here:

**Sterna caspia.** CASPIAN TERN.—Although this splendid tern is a fairly regular transient visitor in the autumn I have no record of so many of them being seen together as in this present year when on Aug. 31, 1917, twelve flew south in a loose flock over Ipswich beach within two hundred yards of me. Their large size, bright red bills, black caps and snowy plumage made a very striking picture. Several emitted their characteristic harsh rasping cries.

**Sterna dougalli.** ROSEATE TERN.—When the Essex County memoir, was published in 1905, I noted that I had never seen the bird and that it was a "Rare transient visitor." Since then there has been a great increase in the number of Common Terns along this coast, and, since 1910, the Roseate Tern has been seen among them and has become more and more common so that this year at times it has even surpassed them in numbers. The bird is easily recognized as a whiter bird than the Common Tern and one with a longer tail. The dark bill at once separates it from the Common Tern with its red, dark-tipped bill. Some of its cries are especially characteristic. The "cloth-tearing" cry is easily recognized and especially the rather sweet double note suggestive of the call of the Ring-neck Plover, which at times is shortened and roughened so that it sounds like *chivy*.

Both the Common and Roseate Terns and also the Arctic Tern feed their full grown young at the beach at Ipswich. Some of these birds may have come from Muskeegit on the south or the coast of Maine on the north. The abundance of the sand lance, *Ammodytes americanus*, which often fill the water in countless schools and leave with the falling tide a silvery covering to the sands, makes the Ipswich beach a favorite resort for terns. The young seem always to be hungry and call in a monotonous and beseeching way whenever an adult appears with a fish. There are three methods of receiving the fish from the parent:—either in the air, on the land, or on the water. In the air the feeding of the young is often a graceful and interesting performance. By a series of aerial evolutions

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<sup>1</sup> Read before the Nuttall Ornithological Club, Oct. 15, 1917.

the adult and young reach a point where the transference of the fish directly from bill to bill is made so quickly that one often can not be sure that the fish is thrown or dropped or actually passed from mouth to mouth. I am inclined to think that all three methods are used.

On the sand beach the young sometimes collect in numbers, while the adults fish for them, and all the young seem eager to take food from any adult. On one occasion at Ipswich I saw an adult tern with a fish in its bill alight on the beach near two immature birds who both clamored loudly to be fed. Disregarding their cries it flew to a third immature bird but was soon off and alighted near an adult to whom it delivered the fish which was swallowed.

The process of feeding the young bird on the surface of the water, is perhaps the most interesting, and points to the former more aquatic ancestry of the terns. An adult flies screaming with a fish in its bill, the young responds by a beseeching call, flies towards the parent, and alights on the water still calling. The old one flies down and delivers the fish without alighting or doing so but for a brief moment. The thing is done so quickly that it is often impossible to know what happens. The young one as soon as it receives the fish flies up into the air. It is rare for adult terns to alight on the water.

I have great hopes that this and other species of terns will return to the upper beach and dunes at Ipswich to breed as they did fifty years ago.

**Mergus serrator.** RED-BREASTED MERGANSER.—The breeding range of this bird according to the 'Check-List' extends on the Atlantic Coast as far south as southern Maine. Mr. E. H. Forbush in his 'Game Birds, Wild-Fowl and Shore Birds of Massachusetts,' 1912, page 66, gives records of cripples raising broods of young on Cape Cod. Although it is common for a few birds to spend the summer at Ipswich I never saw any evidence of breeding until July 30, 1916, when I found a group of eleven young birds nearly full grown with an adult female. A few rods off swam an adult male in partial moult into the eclipse plumage. The male swam alone some distances up the beach, came ashore and preened himself. On being disturbed by my approach, he waddled down to the water and flapped over its surface, but appeared, owing to the moult, to be unable to fly. A week later he had regained his flying powers. The family in the brown dress kept together all summer.

On July 4, 1917, I counted a compact flock of thirty Red-breasted Mergansers off the beach. There were two adult males moulting into eclipse plumage and one or two adult females. The others were young birds as shown by their smaller size and by the close ranks they kept as they turned this way and that. The flock must have been composed of three broods that had united together, a habit I have observed in Labrador in the case of Eiders. I did not have a chance to observe these birds again until the last of August, when I found a flock of twenty-three Red-breasted Mergansers, all in the brown plumage, all swimming together in a close flock.

**Asio wilsonianus.** LONG-EARED OWL.—This owl is generally con-

sidered a good mouser and the farmer's friend. Fisher, in his 'Hawks and Owls of the United States,' 1893, p. 140, says, "The Long-eared Owl is one of our most beneficial species, destroying vast numbers of injurious rodents and seldom touching insectivorous birds." The following record, which is very exceptional, puts him in another category.

On June 3, 1917, I visited a nest of this species, of which I had been kindly informed by Mr. C. E. Clark, in a pitch pine grove in the Ipswich dunes. Four days before Mr. Clark had found three young in the nest. This, probably an old Crow's nest, was in a pitch pine about twenty feet from the ground. Only one young was to be found and it was in the tree ten feet from the nest. It was in white down with a dark face and with ear tufts of white down. An adult bird flew about among and over the trees, alighting from time to time near the nest. Once it was mobbed by three Crows as it flew above the trees, but easily eluded them. This was in the middle of a sunny day. It constantly uttered low notes which suggested at times the barking of a small puppy, at times the notes *ud-hunk*.

There were numerous pellets around the foot of the tree and the whole upper part of the nest was heavily thatched with feathers and a few bones. I sent all the pellets I could find to the Biological Survey in Washington, and a month later some more pellets and the upper layers of the nest. The first report is as follows:

Contents of about 10 pellets: Red-winged Blackbird 1, Savannah Sparrow 1, Vesper Sparrow 1, Chipping Sparrow 1, Song Sparrow 1, Chewink 1, Black and White Warbler 1, Yellow Warbler 1, Pine Warbler 1, Maryland Yellowthroat 1, Thrushes sp. 2, other passerine birds (indeterminate) 2, Short-tailed Shrew 1, Jumping Mouse 10, Meadow Mouse 7.

The second set of pellets brought the following report:

Red-winged Blackbird 1, Sharp-tailed Sparrow 1, Song Sparrow 1, Yellow Warbler 1, Warblers sp. 2, Brown Thrasher 1, other passerine birds 2, Short-tailed Shrew 1, White-footed Mouse 1, Jumping Mouse 1, Meadow Mouse, 4.

It will be seen that this pair of owls had eaten some thirteen different species of birds and twenty-three individuals; also four species of mammals and twenty-five individuals.

Mr. E. W. Nelson in a letter of June 21, 1917, commenting on these findings says: "This is an interesting lot of pellets, as it is very unusual to find the long-eared owl feeding upon birds to such an extent. In a large number of pellets examined from winter roosts of these birds, we have found the bird remains making up considerably less than 10 per cent of the total animal contents. The owls in question must have had exceptional opportunities to secure birds, and the breeding season may also have had some effect in producing this habit." The Ipswich dunes are, as I have always maintained, particularly good regions for birds, and this owl seems to have had the instincts of a collector.

**Ceryle alcyon.** KINGFISHER.—This bird is believed to be such an exclusive fish eater that any deviation from this diet is worth recording.

Early in August, 1917, Mr. John Hair, gamekeeper of Mr. R. T. Crane at Ipswich, missed six of a four days old brood of Bob-whites. He had seen a Kingfisher nearby and later the same day saw it perched on the gable end of the little house where the Bob-whites had been hatched, and from there pounce on the young birds as they ran in and out. He shot the Kingfisher, and, on opening the bird, a female, found the legs and feathers of the young Bob-whites in its crop.


Most authors state that the Kingfisher is exclusively a fish eater. Knight, 'Birds of Maine', 1908, p. 270, says Kingfishers feed on "grasshoppers, also crickets, butterflies and moths, which latter two I have seen the birds take while on the wing, chasing them until they are caught." Weed and Dearborn, 'Birds in their Relations to Man,' 1903, p. 192, say: "The food consists principally of fish, but occasionally mice, frogs or grasshoppers are captured." I have been unable to find in literature any record of the capture of birds by Kingfishers.

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## NOTES ON NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS.

### V.

BY HARRY C. OBERHOLSER.

THE notes below presented<sup>1</sup> concern the status of four North American birds. These are, respectively, members of the families *Buteonidæ*, *Regulidæ*, and *Fringillidæ*. 

#### *Astur atricapillus* (Wilson).

Dr. Ernst Hartert has recently<sup>2</sup> included the North American Goshawk, *Accipiter atricapillus* Wilson, among the subspecies of the European Goshawk, *Astur palumbarius* (Linnæus), or, as he calls it, *Accipiter gentilis* (Linnæus). Examination of a series of

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<sup>1</sup> For previous papers in this series, cf. 'The Auk,' XXXIV, April, 1917, pp. 191-196; XXXIV, July, 1917, pp. 321-329; XXXIV, October, 1917, pp. 465-470; and XXXV, January, 1918, pp. 62-65.

<sup>2</sup> Vögel paläarkt. Fauna, Heft IX (Band II, Heft 3), October, 1914, p. 1146.